

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

March 16, 2021

1:03 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Chris Tuck, Chair  
Representative Andi Story  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Laddie Shaw  
Representative David Nelson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 125

"An Act relating to private sector and state employment preferences for active service members, veterans, and spouses and dependent children of active service members and veterans; relating to employment preferences for surviving spouses of deceased service members and veterans; and relating to employment preferences for disabled veterans and former prisoners of war."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 125

SHORT TITLE: MILITARY AND FAMILY EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCE

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) NELSON

03/05/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/21	(H)	MLV, L&C
03/16/21	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 125.

DAVID CHAPA, Executive Director  
Alaska Coalition for Veterans and Military Families  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

TAMMIE PERREAULT, Northwest Regional Liaison  
Defense-State Liaison Office  
U.S. Department of Defense  
Olympia, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

DANA MANCIAGLI, President  
Job Search Master Class  
Bellevue, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:03:21 PM](#)

**CHAIR CHRIS TUCK** called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Representatives Claman, Rauscher, Nelson, Story, Shaw, Tuck were present at the call to order. Representative Tarr arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HB 125-MILITARY AND FAMILY EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCE**

[1:04:19 PM](#)

CHAIR TUCK announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL 125, "An Act relating to private sector and state employment preferences for active service members, veterans, and spouses and dependent children of active service members and veterans; relating to employment preferences for surviving spouses of deceased service members and veterans; and relating to employment preferences for disabled veterans and former prisoners of war."

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REPRESENTATIVE DAVID NELSON, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 125. He paraphrased the sponsor statement [hard copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

HB 125 seeks to extend the current private sector and state employment hiring preferences to military spouses and dependent children.

Military spouses are among the highest unemployed and underemployed group. They are highly educated and qualified for a range of careers but because of frequent moves the unemployment rate among military spouses is 24% and there is a 26% wage gap compared to civilian counterparts.

In 2019 the Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey found that 49% of military spouses indicated that financial issues were the top stressor for military families, and 48% were concerned about employment. Of employed military spouses 75 % were considered underemployed. HB 125 can provide some help to reduce these concerns for military families by providing a hiring preference.

A Covid-19 Military Support Initiative created by the Blue Star Families and the Association of Defense Communities found that an additional 17% of military spouses lost their jobs during the pandemic on top of the 24% unemployment before the pandemic.

Currently 35 states and the District of Columbia provide hiring preferences to active-duty spouses or surviving spouses. HB 125 will add Alaska to this growing list of states that support our military community and honor the sacrifices these families make in service to our country.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON offered to answer questions.

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REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked whether this bill had been introduced in prior legislatures by a House member not currently serving.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON replied that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE CLAMAN asked how this bill has changed from the prior versions.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON responded that this is the same bill that passed the House in the Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature as House Bill 113, sponsored by Representative Jackson, and that there has been no change.

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CHAIR TUCK noted that Representative Tarr joined the meeting.

1:09:00 PM

DAVID CHAPA, Executive Director, Alaska Coalition for Veterans and Military Families, testified in support of HB 125. He said that the unemployment rate among military spouses is four times that of the national average, and about twice as high as the unemployment rate of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the country. He said that his organization has seen "an increase of both parents out of work" due to COVID-19, and families in which parents and children were disabled. Offering preference in hiring to military spouses will go a long way towards helping those families.

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TAMMIE PERREAULT, Northwest Regional Liaison, Defense-State Liaison Office, U.S. Department of Defense, testified in support of HB 125. She described the purpose of the Defense-State Liaison Office to be a resource for state policymakers who are addressing quality-of-life issues that impact military and veteran families. She read from a 2020 letter from the Undersecretary of Defense to Governor Dunleavy, as follows:

Military spouse employment and the associated financial and personal wellbeing is an important component of retention of servicemembers. More than half of all active-duty military personnel are married, and 88 percent of employed military spouses indicate they wanted, or needed, to work. Not only are military spouses highly influential in general, regarding their servicemembers decision to remain in service, but over 28 percent of servicemembers reported that their decision to leave the military would largely or moderately be affected by their spouses' career prospects.

MS. PERRAULT noted that Alaska has approximately 8,000 active-duty military and 3,200 Reserve spouses, and noted that military

spouses are both an important part of the workforce and among the highest unemployed, and underemployed, group in the nation.

1:13:00 PM

DANA MANCIAGLI, President, Job Search Master Class, testified in support of HB 125. She described how corporate and legislative support has made a difference in transitioning veterans, but "military spouses have been left behind," and since 92 percent of all military spouses are women, there's an opportunity to build a more diverse working population. She said that military spouses are highly qualified, then described the concept of "unconscious bias" and suggested that military spouses are discriminated against. She opined that the proposed legislation would send a signal to corporate recruiters about the importance of hiring military spouses. She said that more than 40 percent of military spouses have college degrees compared with 30 percent of civilians, and more than 43 percent of military spouses list "employment" as their top issue.

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CHAIR TUCK asked Ms. Manciangli to explain whether she was talking about the families of active servicemembers or veterans.

MS. MANCIAGLI responded, "In our taxonomy, it is everybody." She said that regardless of the status of the servicemember, the spouse is [recognized] "for life, for giving us their support to our country."

CHAIR TUCK used the example of a veteran who has been out of the service for years and asked whether there is prejudice against the veteran's spouse when applying for a job.

MS. MANCIAGLI responded as follows:

Let's reverse the tables. So, remember that the veteran community makes up only approximately 3 percent of our planet, so the majority of hiring managers, recruiters, anyone influencing the hire decision - they don't know anything about anything, and they don't have this distinction in their brain. So, if the military spouse, proudly - loud and proud - says, "I'm a military spouse," whether it's a veteran, current active soldier, a transitioning servicemember - we, ... on the other side of the table, don't even know the difference. All we know is you move a lot.

... I help military spouses present themselves differently and withhold information that's none of the company's business. The company shouldn't even know they're married, so that's illegal stuff, ... so, there's a trap there with being loud and proud as a military spouse. But the answer to your question is there is: no discrimination within the discrimination.

CHAIR TUCK noted that marital status is a protected class and mused about the possibility of discrimination due to being a military spouse falling into that class.

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REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER noted Ms. Manciangli's figure of "3 percent of the planet" and asked what percentage of Alaska is military and veteran.

REPRESENTATIVE TARR offered her understanding that there are approximately 270,000 active military, veterans, and dependents statewide.

CHAIR TUCK surmised that approximately one-third of Alaska's population is military-related.

MS. MANCIAGLI clarified that the proportion of Alaska's military population to the state's overall population is similar to other states "and especially some cities," and she said that a lot of the recruiting is done by someone who is not from a military background. She said that many candidates are found via LinkedIn, and that what the military spouses include in their resume and LinkedIn page "can fast-track them into the 'no' pile." She said that there is opportunity to train military spouses to better compete for jobs.

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REPRESENTATIVE SHAW noted that he is a beneficiary of [a disabled vet/POW hiring preference bill from the 1980s]. He said that the value of HB 125 could be that someone who is not as qualified as others, or does not meet the minimum standards for a position, could be put on a level playing field with those who do.

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CHAIR TUCK referred to Representative Nelson's opening comments regarding the pandemic and dual-income families. He asked whether the term "military spouse" is applicable to the spouse of a veteran as well, as it related to dual-income families during the pandemic.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON clarified that he was referencing the military support initiative created by Blue Star Families, and that the reference was applicable to spouses of active duty servicemembers only.

CHAIR TUCK noted the comment about both wage-earners losing their jobs due to the pandemic, and asked how it's possible for someone to lose their job while serving in the military.

REPRESENTATIVE NELSON clarified that he wasn't implying that both wage-earners lost their jobs.

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CHAIR TUCK announced that HB 125 was held over.

[1:27:38 PM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 1:28 p.m.